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ABSTRACT

This paper describes, reflects on, and analyzes the process of engaging student writers in a creative-critical writing workshop in which they not only work toward presenting a portfolio of original work, but are engaged in performance, dramatic intervention, and creative challenges to texts. The paper explains how students are invited to meet texts--their own and others--as artisans and craftspeople who can make various changes with surprising results. (Contains 14 references and 2 notes.) (Author/EF)

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ED 443 125

Artisans who create and challenge

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Abstract: We describe, reflect on and analyse the process of engaging student writers in a creative- critical writing workshop in which they not only work toward presenting a folio of original work, but are engaged in performance and dramatic intervention and creative challenges to texts. We invite students to meet texts - their own and those of others - as artisans, as crafts/wo/men who can make micro and macro changes with surprising results.

In the subject we are going to describe in this paper, one of the students, Luke Groom one day entertained us with a reading of the following text.

I'm the Brownings' chambermaid
Overworked and underpaid
While cleaning up their stately home
I stumbled on Robert's latest poem
And like the envoy asked to look
Upon the portrait on the hook
I find the words upon the page
Signifying Robert's rage
For while his wife is rich with fame
Her poems meeting much acclaim
The poems of my tiring Lord
Are as a general rule ignored

The Duke was jealous so it seems
His envy causing him to deeml
Restrictions on his wife's sweet smile
That other men received each while
And though it pains me, this is clear
The same bitterness is brewing here
Browning's wife and her great writing
Will soon have my Lord and Lady fighting
About who bears the greatest claim
To the famous Browning name
Though Elizabeth might share his home
Like the Duchess in the poem

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C. Woods

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By sticking to her maiden name
She brings poor Robert endless pain

Luke's piece emerged after a process of reading/exploring Robert Browning's poem My Last Duchess, prompted by our question, 'What if the text were different?' The question as posed was designed to prompt an imaginative critique of the poem. Luke's doggerel has a serious purpose and reveals not only his exploration of some of the biographical details of the two poets under scrutiny but also his awareness of language and style used to maintain a semblance of the era in which the original was written but designed to comment on issues of social and personal relationships relevant today.

'Imagination is a critical weapon', says Alex Mc Cleod (1992,113). He writes, acknowledging the influence of Bakhtin:

> Imagination, like argument, I see growing first as a conversation. Imagination is socially constructed, not something magically generated from within. The 'conversation' we might be having now finds its way into the array of conversations in the past: an intertextuality of thinking. (1992,105)

Although McCleod's essay is critical of teaching writing in secondary classes where he suggests 'creative' writing is often neither creative or imaginative, it has direct relevance to 'creative' writing within the academy:

> It becomes routine and will certainly not encourage students, in their writing , to explore their most significant thinking. More seriously, students may not be encouraged, imaginatively or otherwise, to engage with issues that they feel really concern them, and which may well concern them even more in the future (1992,113).

Thus, he makes the statement about the critical power of the imagination as 'a way of making commentary on the state of the world, about things as they are' (113). McCleod's focus on the imagination as a social construction, on the intertextuality of thinking and thus on the dialogic nature of discourse and of the imagination is echoed in what we intend should happen in this class.

Our students are invited to enter a dialogue with many texts via a process of intervention. As writers they become particular readers of texts. As readers they read with an eye to re-writing and creating a new and different text which has something to say. Students act as 'imaginative readers' and 'active re- writers' (Pope, 1995,3). We invite changes and challenges which can be subtle or outrageous. We invite students to experiment with word choice, sound, grammatical structures and with the larger organisational choice of form. We invite them to read a wide range of literature and to imagine these through creative/critical rewriting as parallel, opposed and alternative texts.

The subject we describe is a second level subject in an undergraduate degree with a major in Professional Writing and Communication(Note 1). Writing and Text Workshop is a Level 2 subject which students elect to take after completing the first three of five compulsory subjects (Note 2). The major is interdisciplinary in its approach yet theoretically grounded inter alia in the ethnography of communication, critical and cultural theory, and rhetoric, that is, the arts of discourse in context. The approach taken is that all subjects in the major should offer students an intensive experience in both writing and reading, and in understanding texts, writers and readers in social and cultural contexts. Writing and Text Workshop is no exception. It provides a focused approach to reading and writing texts of all kinds from novel-length works to short pieces. Students undertake writing and reading activities which become the catalysts for the writing which they will submit in a final folio of original work.

Our students - school leavers, working professionals, and mature age students from a wide range of backgrounds - tend not to have a wide working knowledge of literary theory or a substantial experience of reading, responding to, analysing and interpreting texts. Certainly the Foundation Studies in the degree introduce them to some ways

of approaching text and of situating texts, textual practices, readers and writers in social and cultural contexts. We felt however that there was a need for a subject which quite specifically introduced them to current literary and critical theory and techniques. At the same time, we wanted to give them an opportunity to 'take off ' with their writing - particularly in fiction and poetry. The subject is thus made available as a first option or elective within the major so that it acts as a stepping stone for or a complementary study alongside the other writing subjects.

Both of us have been English teachers for many years and have taught in a wide range of literature and writing subjects. We have been particularly aware of the need to give students a space in which to renew and extend their identities as readers and as writers. InWriting and Text Workshop we have thus created a subject which draws on our own experiences of involving student writers in writing and reading activities which challenge them to challenge texts, their own and those of others, in creative and critical ways.

Our work has been further supported by the work of a colleague at Oxford-Brookes University, Rob Pope, whose book, Textual Intervention, (Routledge, 1995) captures much of our own practice and extends it in imaginative ways. The book is a pivot for much of the workshop activity. The spirit of the text is exactly right for our subject. It fits well with our own experience of teaching; it confirms and extends our own practices as teachers. It offers a wealth of information about critical practices across range of texts and, crucially for our students, it presents an engaging and interactive approach to reading and writing. Pope's approach is playful yet serious. He says of the process presented in the text:

The best ways to understand how a text works, I argue, is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then to try to account for the exact effect of what you have done. (1995,1)

He describes how the change may be micro-linguistic (localised choices of words, sounds, etc) or macro-linguistic (larger scale choices of organising the text). He suggests changes that lead to the creation of parallel, opposed or alternative texts. Texts can be recast in different forms, unexplored characters foregrounded, scenes created where in the original only an allusion or hint exists.

The approach has been particularly generative for our students, prompting from them work they would not have contemplated without the impetus of creating an alternative text, perhaps to the William Carlos Williams' poem This is Just to Say or in response to Browning's My Last Duchess. What is interesting is that while some students stay relatively close to the base text (as Pope calls it) others find themselves spinning and weaving other writing that surprises them and us with its impact, freshness and originality. But of course they are also engaged in an enterprise in which they come to understand how texts feed off each other; how writers and texts are in a continuous conversation and engaged constantly in a dialogic process.

Of course they are not alone in the enterprise of working from other texts in creative ways. Consider the recent collection edited by Susan Gleason, Regarding Jane Eyre in which Amy Witting, Carmel Bird Rosie Scott, Jean Bedford and others continue in the manner of Jean Rhys, and build stories prompted by Charlotte Bronte's novel (Geason, 1997). Or crime writer Michael Dibden reworking the Last Duchess with a twist as a 19th century detective story in which Robert Browning is himself a character. We could go on.

Textual Intervention, sits at the end of a long tradition in English teaching which relies on approaches to reading through reconfiguration of texts through writing, drama and the visual or musical arts. Its difference from most previous approaches comes from its incorporation of postmodern theory and the freedom this brings in dealing with text, with other work such as linguistics and narratology. It is also a book aimed at a post-secondary audience, though much of its pedagogy can be easily modified for schools - indeed has proved very accessible when presented at English teachers' conferences and workshops. A significant South Australian English curriculum document of the mid-1980s, A Single Impulse (1984) advocated an 'interventionist' approach to the teaching of literature, though from a very traditional critical viewpoint and stance on text selection.

In fact the use of re/construction as pedagogy has an important place in school English in several ways, notably in the work of many of the educators of the early Twentieth Century Progressive movement, for example H Caldwell Cook and A S Neill, and in the early 'growth movement' advocates of the 1950s and 60s, like Marjorie Hourd, David Holbrook and Frank Whitehead.

In The Play Way (1917) Cook describes exercises in story- and play-making which draw on elements of pupils' reading, welding material from different texts into new ones, though the aim was developmental, not analytic ('The plays of boys should be romances and the style should be poetic' (p. 272); no realism until they're older). Similarly Hourd in The Education of the Poetic Spirit (1949) and Holbrook in The Exploring Word (1967) and earlier books advocate creative writing work based on experiment and encouragement on the one hand, and reading for models and ideas to feed writing, on the other. For all of these writers interventionist approaches were valuable within a firm canonical perimeter and formalist critical viewpoint to serve the educational aims of personal growth and development.

In the work of Peter Abbs such asEnglish Within the Arts (1982) writing takes its place in the curriculum alongside music, dance and the visual arts, often in an integrated, transformational manner. Commenting on the processes of composition he points out that in education what is presented is:

> the conclusion of the creative act...seldom its origins. Of course it is necessary to disseminate finished work and struggle for its elucidation and appreciation but we must be careful not to allow the formal architecture of the completed artefact to hide the chaos that may have attended its creation' (1982, 58).

In fact much of the work in school writing during the seventies and eighties was based on notions about reworking 'existing' text, for example, merging two poems, reworking endings of stories, creating video versions of written text or interviewing characters from literature as role play. What is being described here would be regarded as orthodoxy by many English teachers today, though it is important to note that then (as often now) the work was used to underpin quite conservative, untheorised views of the nature of literature, reading and criticism.

Pam Gilbert (1989), was among several writers who argued that there was a need to move from 'voice' to 'text' in a 'reappraisal of discourses on school writing in the secondary English classroom: a shift from phonocentric speech oriented theories of writing', such as those of Donald Graves and Donald Murray, much in vogue at the time and still embedded in English curriculum, 'to theories of textuality and discursive practice' (p. 163). The range of practices which might be broadly called 'interventionist', which taught 'reading through writing' (and other transformation such as performance) have subsequently proved a useful methodology in changing English in the directions that Gilbert and others indicated, both in schools, and University courses.

As explained earlier, English is no longer an optional study for students taking a BA at the University of SA, though many other areas of Textual study are. In designing the subject Writing and Text Workshop, staff however built on previous approaches to English at the University of South Australia, and its predecessor SA College of Advanced Education, as well as the work of writers such as Rob Pope. During the 1980s, at the Salisbury Campus of the CAE, English was taught in a highly innovative program which drew not only on the kind of work described above, but more importantly on the work of linguists such as Dell Hymes and Michael Halliday and a wide range of literary, gender and cultural theory as well. Textual intervention and re/writing were an integral part of the work, as were a range of methodological practices such as group work (and assessment), links with drama and film, the use of fieldwork/excursion (out-of-classroom) techniques in teaching reading and writing, negotiated assessment tasks and the merging of theoretical approaches often through creative writing.

This work was quite well known in Australia and the United Kingdom at the time, from articles and conference presentations, but did not as a whole survive the reorganisation which followed the formation of the new

University. A coherent account of the first year of the program exists as Reconstructing English (1989), by Jackie Cook, David Homer and Helen Nixon, prepared before a lecture visit to England. Pope's work goes a step beyond it in providing many alternative ways to approach texts, and more closely integrates a number of textual approaches as a handbook of Literary Studies which can either be a course in itself, or the methodological base for any number of courses.

It is interesting that in both the cases alluded to, the methodological impetus comes out of what might be called the 'new university' sector, that is institutions which were formerly polytechnics or in Australia, CAEs. Many other cases could be cited. So in working in this way with our students, we are within a tradition, albeit not a mainstream tradition. It is characterised by openness and flexibility, the valuing of the idea that all manner of texts are worth investigation, and that in the name of intervention, ways of writing and presentation are discovered which are highly original and revealing.

The main point is that we encourage our students not only to write freely but also to understand texts by engaging with them as writers and reader/ re-writers of texts. Pope says of this approach that there is ' no 'mystique' or 'secret'. It is he suggests 'artisanal', which of course sits easily in a course for students of 'Professional Writing and Communication'. He elaborates:

Approaching texts as an 'artisan', as a 'crafts/wo/man' means that you treat them with respect - but also the no - nonsense directness and systematicness - that a skilled engineer or dressmaker approaches their materials and the immediate task in hand. Materials and tools are to be chosen and decisions about how, when and where to use them are to be made' (1995,3).

For the purpose of this paper we now discuss briefly one reading/ rewriting activity inWriting and Text Workshop which we will illustrate with examples from our students' writing folios.

We also introduce the mid-term review activity in which students work in pairs to explore, play around with and produce a text and present their work to us. Their responses to these activities have been exciting for them, illuminating for us, and we think a powerful experience not only for them as readers but also as writers who learn much about working with other writers in supportive and collaborative ways.

We discuss this process for what it reveals about collaboration between writers, the opportunity for generating spontaneous individual composition, performance and insights; writing something/writing the unexpected; reading differently and interpretation; getting underneath the skin of the text; and the dynamic relationship between the analytic and the creative in writing.

De-centring and re-centring Browning's My Last Duchess

One of the early activities in the course (Pope 1995,14-30) is an extensive 'working over' of Browning's classic poem about power and intrigue in sixteenth century Italy. Pope suggests far more approaches than you would ever want (or have time) to do, all of which have the effect of first destablising 'the' original text, and then rewriting it to orient it with 'another' centre. The suggested approaches are drawn from a range of critical/analytic practice ranging from broad socio-cultural accounts of text, reader-response theory to deconstruction.

We encourage students to use the ideas in the textbook to attempt a re/writing of the poem. For example, one run of activities invites them to contemplate all of the people who are actually presented in the poem (the envoy, the Count etc) as well as those who aren't, but are represented through, for example, artefacts (gardeners, servants etc). They are invited to become 'unco-operative readers', working against the role of preferred reader constructed by the poem (perhaps a reader who says, 'well, that's how things were then'). They then go on and put one of these 'other' participants at the centre of the new text they are creating, as Luke has done in implicating not just the Brownings, but their servant as well.

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His version resonates quite beautifully with the original in terms of both gender and class politics, and through its idiom, the politics of linguistic usage, as well as plot. It thus raises interventions which are of a type which Pope calls 'from outside the text', which might ultimately lead students to ask whether the poem is 'about' an event in Renaissence Italy at all, but rather about mid-Nineteenth Century England, as well as what it means in Australia, now.

Another intervention in My Last Duchess was by Emma Barber who wrote 'Notes on Fra Pandolf's The Beautiful Duchess of Milan" part of which follows.

First Sitting - 2 hours

Ñ by sliding the back of the hand over the canvas one can feel if it hangs loosely or is stretched too taut.

Ñ if the model is a slender woman she should perch elegantly on a simple chair, turning sideways so the light strikes her bone structure and emphasises her delicacy.

Ñ if the model is overweight, she should be wrapped in a thick, heavy mantle so that the texture and folds of the garment can be fully explored in the painting. This will also distract the viewer from her rotund form.

Ñ if the model has a knowledge of such artistic trickery, flatter her, e.g. a classic line is 'Paint must never hope to reproduce the faint half-flush that dies along your throat'.

Ñ her face must be painted in the favoured style - mix rosa with a fine tint for the cheeks, this will give the ideal cherubic flush. Her skin must be pure white, with rosy buds. Do not be exact. Ignore those scars and bruises.

See how the husband paces like a dark shadow behind her.

Ñ use white tint to brighten saddened eyes...Make her eyes sparkle more than those diamonds upon her bosom...

Vacant portholes of an abandoned ship are her eyes. They are swimming with tears and old ghosts.

....

Ñ use cross hatching to give texture to the mantle. The lines intersect from left and right so the onlooker can almost feel the material.

Ñ the blackness of her cloak symbolises her purity, her simpleness of nature, her staidness.

She looks so solemn for one so young. The Duke spits his curses at the wailing babe. Her forehead corrugates painfully, rippling her bruised brow.

Ñ black is the mark of a virtuous woman. yet the white ruffles at her neck barely conceal those passionate purple blotches.

Ñ use a dab of water when painting silken ruffles, to give them some sheen.

'Cherry blossom', he calls her wickedly, injuring the smiles she sends to my Master and I.

Ñ the white ruffles now look pearly against the black mantle.

White versus black...good against evil. Five guineas her husband selected her heavy garb.

Ñ allow the colours to bleed towards the edge of the canvas...

Whereas Luke's piece raises issues about situating Browning's poem and readers, Emma's more directly reworks the material in order to provide an explanation, or an extension of the original. It works against the poem, but not against the idea of a poem as a valid version of experience, of a kind of truth. And it demonstrates the possibility of multiple readings of that kind of truth. Fra Pandolf, the artist, sees the Duchess, as a victim of a ruthless man. The artist's choice of tints and decisions about shading and texture in the painting reveals much about the original poem. Here is a reading through the lens offered by an artist's critical appraisal of the subject and presented as reflective working notes; critical imagination at work in words.

There is not room to produce much of Michelle Wauchope's piece, which almost cuts itself loose from all of these issues in an imagined dialogue between the Duchess in the portrait and the statue of Neptune, with a background chorus from the rest of the palace. You could say that pieces like this third one would not get written without an insistence on intervention for they go beyond comment or extension, into a world of events forever re-enacted in words, like a display in a museum of mechanical marvels.

She turned again to Neptune, clasping her wrists, 'and what say you? What can I do?'

Neptune gathered his reins once more, in preparation for his perpetual taming of the seahorse. 'My lady, you can do nothing but grow heavy in heart and colder. You cannot break the guilt any more than the gilt edging which surrounds you. There are no measures you can take'.

'Such a pity, such a pity,' sighed the floors. 'Such a pity, sighed the walls'.

'Think of cherry blossoms', suggested the chair, but her only response was to sigh and relent, a half flush along her throat as she stopped fighting against her two dimensional binds.

'She is quiet', murmured the ceiling, 'she moves not'.

The two transient beings stood and made their way together down the stairs, to where the Count's envoy and his fair daughter awaited.

'It was he, it was he', hissed the mirrors, as only mirrors can, but the men could only hear them as a draught in the room, shrugging off the chill as they felt it.

The seahorse turned again to once more strain on his reins. 'She will not be the Last Duchess.

The house could say nothing.

So without reference to, say, Julia Kristeva or Harold Bloom, to Intertextuality or Deconstruction, we would want to claim that these three excellent pieces, and ways of writing like them, illustrate the value of encouraging textual intervention in a writing program. Not only are they a means of coming to understand text, but more importantly as a means of encouraging students to inhabit and explore territory that they would otherwise pass by.

And as we shall see,My Last Duchess is a medium-length text in terms of the course. Intervention is wrought

upon pieces as short as a classified advertisement and as long as Jane Eyre.

Interlude: Assessment

There are four components to assessment of the subject, one of which is for participation - impossible to avoid given the active, flexible methodology. The students also submit a folder of original pieces which may be the result of 'exercises', or suggested by other aspects of the course. These are submitted for comment and workshopped during the semester. Another component is the preparation of a poster which illustrates an aspect, issue or text from the course in a visual/interactive manner, and is presented to the class in the final session.

The fourth assessment task is a kind of viva voce which occurs in the middle of the semester and serves the extra purpose of us being able to monitor students' reactions to the course. Students work in pairs to create a text by 'intervening' in another, 'base text' and present their work to us during a twenty minute interview. It is texts from this activity to which we want to turn now, to give a sense of some of the writing generated by the course.

Conversation by Note

As the basis of an exercise in examining such matters as the personal pronoun system, the notion of agency and Bakhtinian and other ideas about subject-position, Textual Intervention proffers William Carlos Williams' piece This is just to say

> This is just to say
> I have eaten
> the plums
> that were
> in the icebox
>
> and which
> you were probably
> saving for breakfast
>
> Forgive me
> they were delicious
> so sweet
> and so cold

Many questions can be posed about this text, for example what genre it is, or how we might know whether it is a piece of instrumental, functional language use or 'poetry', or something else. You can speculate about the nature of the 'I' and 'you' (singular or plural), (in terms of gender, race, age, nationality, period) and their relationship. You can try to align 'yourself' with one or the other, or 'write back' in any number of ways to test your hunches (Pope pp 62-66).

For Peter Szantyr and Sophie Rose, the work led to a collaborative writing process which they called 'spontaneous individual composition'. They sat down as invented personae - two flatmates who leave notes for each other on the fridge door. And they wrote a sequence of notes back and forward, one at a time. The dialogue in notes is read by each 'flatmate' in turn. Some of it goes like this:

> Sophie (reading a note)
>
> Sorry, I had to leave early. Can you please take the chicken fillets out of the fridge at nine. I'll make a curry when I get home around six.

Peter

Peter (reading note)

Why did you leave early? Margie called. I'm sick of being the messenger. Enjoy your curry!

Sophie

Sophie

Well 'scuse me. Your the one who didn't want an answering machine. And the curry would have been better if you had remembered to BUY RICE.

Peter

Peter

I have to scoff
Where do you get off?
I'm not your mother
Nor your lover!
Dare not tread
Upon my head
Unless you soon wish to be dead.

Sophie

Sophie

Margie knows, and can recommend, a doctor for PMT from which you seem to be suffering. Forgive my mistake, but wasn't it your turn to do the shopping?

Peter

Peter

The only things I suffer are

Prickly

Male

Taunts

p.s. I did shop and there is something in the rice canister for you.

Sophie

Sophie

Thanks. I know I've been grumpy lately. Margie is driving me crazy. I think she needs to see her friend. I bought some ripe plums for you. I hope you like them. See you tonight.

Peter

Peter

Craziness is driving Margie, but what's driving you? Can we eat the plums - yum! - tomorrow? I'm staying at Sam's tonight.

Sophie

Sophie

There was a young man in Magill
Who swallowed his pride's bitter pill
To increase the harmony
With his co-habitant, Sophie.
The plums are in the 'fridge still

Peter

....

They found, of course that they soon had developing personalities, a narrative, and two other characters (Margie and Sam) on their hands and thus a plot. They even wrote 'comments from Sam' and a 'letter to Peter', from Margie, after they had finished. In discussion we explored the points at which the whole thing could have been sent in different directions, thus engaging with ideas about plotting, and also about the functions of dialogue in 'growing' a narrative context. There are also interesting matters such as how it would work without the 'Peter and Sophies', whether some of the exchanges could be re-ordered, and whether 'the end' (not reproduced here) is inevitable or problematic. In short, while the exercise began with activities which are essentially analytic, it ended with a learning outcome which was much more focused on practical problems to do with writing. Something like this happened on many occasions during the course.

An interview with Robinson Crusoe

For their viva , Elizabeth Ingerson and Dominique Wilson produced an interview with Robinson Crusoe by a fairly aggressive reporter, the last part of which is reproduced below.

...

I'm not here to justify and explain my lifestyle..What you have to remember is that I was also a slave for many years, to the Moors, before I managed to escape. Don't you think that this experience would have shaped my treatment of any person with whom I worked?

Perhaps, Sir, it only strengthened your dislike for anyone not British, or more specifically, not white. But let's look at another part of Mr Friday's book. That part where you again rescued someone from cannibals. This time the captain of the ship. You state that you only killed one or two of the mutineers, and that the others were left on the island to live and prosper, thanks to your kindness and instructions. But Mr Friday describes that event as a true blood bath. He states that you attacked without thought, and that it was only the intervention of his chiefs that stopped your carnage and

saved the captain.

Oh, how quickly Mr Friday forgets! And how he glorifies those events which really were quite minor. Have you ever been placed in a situation in which things got more out of hand than you imagined? What good is being able to write our own histories, if at times we cannot create our own truths? I'm not saying my version isn't totally accurate, but perhaps some more insignificant details have been omitted. I admit that Providence has played a large part in my survival, and I give eternal thanks to God that...

So you consider the potential mass murder of a ship's crew trivial, do you?

I'm not willing to support Mr Friday's suggestions about how anything happened. I'm also not willing to speculate on inconsequential and really incorrect matters raised by Friday.

By the way, Mr Crusoe, are you aware that throughout your entire book you refer to Mr Friday simply as Friday, yet Mr Friday refers to you in his book as Mr Crusoe.

Actually, I referred to him mostly as 'my man Friday'. It was a sign of our closeness..of affection. And anyway, are you totally forgetting the historical timing of the publication of my memoirs? Are you also forgetting I was much older, and much longer on the island, than Friday..sorry, Mr Friday?!

Respect for another human being is irrespective of age or time, Mr Crusoe.

I am not here to debate petty politeness!

You are constantly saying that you are not here for one reason or another. What are you here for, Mr Crusoe? Why did you agree to be interviewed?

Because I believe that truth should prevail, and I feel that...

But you said at the beginning of this interview that you were not aware of Mr Friday's memoirs. How can you now say that you came to support your version of the truth?

Well, I may have heard a rumour. But shouldn't the real question, Sir, be 'What is Truth?'

Textual Intervention provides what Pope calls an 'extended workout' on Robinson Crusoe (pp 99-119) as the culmination to a chapter linking narrative, narration and ideology. The strands explored included the persistency of the notion that Crusoe and Friday are eternally locked into a white master/black slave relationship, the 'effect' of Crusoe's 'control' as narrator, and (as with My Last Duchess) and play with the text drawing on textual 'absences' and material which lies around, but not in the story. It is also interesting to examine some of the myths in which the novel participates, which range from its Eurocentricism and colonialism, to the 'childhood' appeal of deserted islands, cubby houses and a manipulable environment (e.g. the 'right' to name things).

Elizabeth and Dominique cover a lot of this territory in their 'interview', especially about the relationships between personality/'character', the position of narrator and the ideological positioning of a text. A lot of the analysis embodied in this piece is a result of very careful attention to language which allows the dialogue to float freely between then and now, here and there, them and us, not to speak of him (or them) and me, and the relationship that implicitly 'exists' between the interviewer and Friday. This last feature, the insight that dialogue is intertextual at the level of relationships is a matter that arose in Peter and Sophie's piece as well. The quality of analysis which takes place in a project such as textual intervention is closely dependent on the quality of writing that participants can bring to it.

Conclusion

However, what is important is that students read texts as writers. An intervention is a writer's activity. Yet it is also a reader's activity since it sets up a conversation with the text. It is the writer in each student who reads with them over their shoulders. The exercise is creative, imaginative and critical. Pope writes of the 'sheer scale and prodigious variety of possible changes to a text' (2), and asserts:

the point is that in theory and in practice virtually all these options are at your disposal, both as an imaginative reader and an active re-writer. ... There is therefore no 'mystique' or 'secret' to the approach: it is one which may properly be called artisanal. (1995,3)

The approach is one of crafting with words, of reading and writing as interrelated imaginative and critical activities. Pope suggests that 'other terms for the current project are 're-composition' and 'radical rhetoric'.' Indeed, situating such work in the domain of rhetorical theory and practice allows for the reconstruction of literary work (reading and writing) as textual practice in the ways postulated by Eagleton (1983), Andrews (1992), Nash(19) and others.

Andrews (commenting on an essay by Hesse in a collection titled Rebirth of Rhetoric) has called for, 'the breaching of the wall between rhetoric (the common language of the world used to 'get things done', the language of persuasion) and poetics (aesthetic, contemplative, self- referring language)' which he suggests, 'enables us to see the aesthetic dimension of everyday language and the persuasive, enactive dimension of artworks' (1992,13 - our emphasis- CW, DH).

With this we can return to the comments offered by McCleod and introduced early in this article that we can see creative writing as an act of critical imagination; critical imagination as socially constructed; and creative writing as a way of acting in the world. McCleod again:

> A writer's imagination feeds on experience and interaction, and at the same time feeds on the personal relationship of writer and reader, as well as writer and teacher. Fostering imagination, which I see as an essential role for writing teachers, should not be equated with those theories which suggests that the'creative' writer turns inward for inspiration which is personal, individual and essentially the opposite of social concern and critical thinking. (1992,113)

In this subject, students experiment with the aesthetics of everyday discourse and they explore through re-writing/reading how texts persuade and entice the reader. Their imaginations are fed by interaction with texts in which they intervene as well as by their own experiences. Writing and Text Workshop sets out to expand students' ways of reading and writing while pushing the boundaries of their critical imaginations. The students' writing prompted by a creative-critical approach to textual practice suggests to us that the course does just that.

Note 1

At the end of their three year course students graduate with a BA (Professional Writing and Communication). It is a degree in which they undertake required Foundation studies in Communication: Rhetoric and Reasoning, Introduction to Computers and Information Management , Media Culture and Society, and Australian State and Society. They also complete a general studies sub-major in a discipline area (eg. Sociology, Gender Studies, Children's Literature, Australian Studies, Performing Arts) and a cognate study (eg. Communication Studies, Multi Media studies, Film and Media Studies, a Language or if they wish additional subjects in Writing and Communication). Unless students seek a cross institutional study with another university they are not able to take a sub-major in what was traditionally English or Literary studies - the territory which has often excited them in their secondary school experience.

Note 2

In the major of eight subjects over three years, students undertake compulsory studies in an introductory writing workshop, linguistics, sociolinguistics, writing and literacy research in community and workplace, and professional and technical writing . They may take options in writing and reading the short story, autobiography and biography, poetry, the essay (including travel writing, personal commentary etc), editing and publishing, advanced writing workshop, script writing and other areas.

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